

## Tragic Events Can Affect Us All

from the American Counseling Association

Were you aware that when you read about or hear about news reports of major tragedies, they may be impacting your own life beyond what you may realize?

The recent devastating hurricanes... reports of terrible earthquake damage... the threatening military actions in the far east... the too-numerous terror attacks occurring in Europe -- any and all of these, no matter how far removed from where you live, are events that can affect each of us in negative ways.

We all want to feel safe in our daily lives, but when we see and hear exhaustive news reports of tragic events on a regular basis, it can bring on very real physical and emotional reactions. It's called vicarious trauma. Such reactions are common and normal in the face of events too large and horrific for normal comprehension. They can make you wonder just how safe you are as you realize that whatever just happened, or something similar, could just as easily happen to you.

Real physical reactions can include chills, nausea, dizziness and headaches. You may find yourself more irritable, prone to anger or having sudden emotional outbursts. Some people experience confusion or nightmares, or may simply find it difficult to relax.

The problems that can arise are not in the emotions we feel, but in how we respond to them. When you deny such feelings, or try to hide from them by working longer hours, or by turning to alcohol or drugs, you aren't validating and accepting your very real, very normal feelings.

A good way to respond to such feelings is to go back to basics. Stick to a schedule. Be well rested. Eat healthy meals. Alternate exercise and relaxation.

If feeling overly anxious, try pampering yourself a little. Take a hot bath, listen to your favorite music, read a good novel, maybe even allow yourself to cry. It's also important to spend time with others and to talk about what you're feeling. In times of tragedy, you'll find others are experiencing similar feelings and reactions and are often eager to discuss them.

It's also a good time to start, or increase, volunteer work. Helping others also helps you as your work makes the world a little bit better.

Being affected by tragedies is a very normal human reaction. When it happens, acknowledge what you're feeling and take steps to help you feel better.

*Counseling Corner* is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).

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